

LIFE STYLE – “Worth Our Salt”

The more I learn of the English language, the more I thank God that I was born in the United States. We love our sayings, which we understand, but God help the poor soul from some other nation (say, for instance, England) who has to try to translate our English into, well, English.

For example, as National Daughter’s Day was this week, if your daughter is similar to you, we say, “Why she’s a chip off the old block.” If we say something with a sense of irony, as in, when her husband arrived home from golf two hours later than he said he’d be, she greeted him with, “Glad to see you made it,” she is speaking tongue-in-cheek. And if you exhibit moral courage, character, and virtue, it was once common to say that you are “worth your salt.”

We’re the ones confused by this one; “worth your salt?” How much is salt worth? We have salt in such abundance that it isn’t worth much. A 40 pound bag for the water softener costs \$5. Canister after canister of Morton and other brands line our shelves. We can even get exotic and purchase kosher sea salt. Oy vey!

In Jesus’ time, salt was worth its weight in gold. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt; that’s the origin of the phrase, “worth your salt.” And in our lesson from Mark, Jesus once again sets his disciples straight as he challenges them and us to have a LIFE STYLE that is worth your salt.

Mark 9:50 (NRSV) Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

1. Let’s Get Fired Up!

Imagine that my befuddled English visitor has gone to a football game. His first confusion stems from the fact that the players aren’t using their feet. This isn’t the beautiful game he knows and loves. And the cheerleaders are saying the strangest things: “Let’s get fired up!” Why do want to put the players in kilns? They’re not pottery!

Jesus talking about hell befuddles us. *Mark 9:43–48 (NRSV)* ⁴³ *If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.* ⁴⁵ *And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.* ⁴⁷ *And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,* ⁴⁸ *where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.*

We’ve come a long way from Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” We don’t motivate Christian behavior with the fear of hell fire and brimstone. We don’t believe in a God who is eager to destroy His good creation. We believe that the God we meet in Jesus Christ is a God who redeems. We believe in a God Who

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will give anything and everything (including His only Son!) to save His good creation. We believe that the best motivation for Christian behavior is gratitude for the incredible grace we have received.

We’ve come a long way from Jonathan Edwards, so what do we do with these challenging words of Jesus?

We don’t take them literally. We know that some who practice Sharia law literally cut off hands and feet. We know that Christianity has an unfortunate history of times when we did take these words literally and did a great deal of harm. We do not throw people into hell literally, figuratively or any other way. We do not condemn anyone as being beyond the reach of God’s love; and therefore, deserving of our rejection. We do not give up on ourselves or anyone else, because there is hell to pay when we do.

We don’t take these words literally but we do take them seriously. How we live, our life style, matters. This summer’s community musical, “The Music Man,” is surely right in saying, “The idle brain is the devil’s playground. Trouble!” It makes all the difference if we offer a hand up or a hand out.

Demons continue to inhabit our world; there is an evil agency in this world that resists the love of God and stands against His kingdom of love, justice, mercy and peace. They don’t have horns and pitchforks; they do have a place in economic systems, political systems, and in any arena in which human beings are in relationship.

The question that is continually before us as the body of Christ, the hands, feet, eyes and ears of our Savior, is are we cooperating with evil, are we colluding with corruption, or are we contributing to the salvation of the world? Are we making deals with the devil, or are we dealing with our demons?

It is hard to admit that there are ways we cooperate; it is hard to own our collusion; we don’t want to hear that we are part of the world’s problem – sin, evil, and death.

No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause. (Teddy Roosevelt)

Let’s get fired up. There is still a place for Jesus words about hell; Daniel Migliore put it this way: “Hell is simply wanting to be oneself apart from God’s grace and in isolation from others.... Hell is self-destructive resistance to the eternal love of God.¹”

¹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 347.

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Contrast that self-destructive resistance with St. Augustine’s classic statement: “Our hearts are ever restless until they find their rest in Thee;” and now we see, *Mark 9:48 (NRSV) where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.*

Let’s get fired up; do not believe in hell; believe against hell. Believe and live with a life style that rests in the grace and goodness of God. Deal with the demons; confront them; conquer them; but do not deny that they exist and do damage in your life and in our world. Deal with them; make the changes you need to make. Do not deny; do not delay; do it today; do it now. Develop a life style that makes you worth your salt.

2. Worth Your Salt

[Vince Lombardi](#) : I've never known a man worth his salt who in the long run, deep down in his heart, didn't appreciate the grind, the discipline... I firmly believe that any man's finest hour--this greatest fulfillment to all he holds dear--is the moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle -- victorious.

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The Dead Sea contains the saltiest water in the world. Floating in the water is a unique experience; on the one hand, you do not displace as much water as usual, so you float higher in the water. On the other hand, if you have any nicks or cuts or scratches, the water finds them, and reveals them with a burning that cannot be denied. On the bright side, after you cover yourself in Dead Sea mud (and yes, there are pictures), float in that water, and wash yourself off; your skin is as soft as a newborn babe’s.

Human beings have harvested that Dead Sea salt for thousands of years, but there is something else that is unique about this salt: it goes stale; it has a shelf life after which it loses its saltiness and develops an unpleasant flavor.

Was this what Jesus was alluding to?

Here in Berks County, we have hard water; meaning that our water has a high level of calcium and other minerals. Left untreated, our soap isn’t as effective and we may have spots on our dishes. Over time, our water pipes pay the price. So we’re off to the local hardware store to buy a water softener which removes the calcium and other minerals by replacing them with sodium chloride-salt. Of course, we have to keep a certain level of salt in the softener or else it will not work.

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Chemistry is chemistry, and a living faith is a lived faith; it is a life style. Dealing with our demons and the evil in this world takes a toll; if we are not careful (and prayerful), our hearts can become just as hard as Berks County water. We don't care about our neighbor. We don't care about “the least of these my brethren.” We don't care about anyone except ourselves.

We become agents of evil; we become the very demons we once opposed.

We need each other to overcome that; we can't do this alone. Being a Christian in isolation from a church makes as much sense as being a toe in isolation from a foot. Pennside Presbyterian Church is worth its salt when we cleanse and renew just like that Dead Sea salt. We are at peace with ourselves and one another. *Isaiah 26:3 (NRSV) Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you.* We keep our hearts and our souls soft and tender, so that we can “love one another” and “love our neighbor,” who is probably dealing with their own demons too. We keep the peace and keep ourselves in peace by trusting in God with and for one another.

Together, we are worth our salt as we create an environment in which love, justice, mercy, and peace are cultivated, developed, promoted, and sustained. That's what the kingdom of God is all about; that's the mission that brought Jesus into this world to confront evil and conquer it; that is the great battle in which we are engaged and have the opportunity in Lombardi's words to work our hearts out and give our all until that great day when we meet our Savior and know that it was all worth it; we are victorious!

Vince Lombardi: "The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual."

Our mission is our mission; it's not the pastor's mission; it's not the Session's mission; it is Pennside Presbyterian's mission, and we dare to believe it is God's mission for us. We dream it. We risk it. We do it.

Living faith is a lived faith; it is a life style. Let's get fired up and believe against hell! Deal with the demons; deal with them today; together, through our combined efforts, our commitment of our time, our talent, and our treasure, Pennside Presbyterian Church, be a church that is worth our salt. Amen.